

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

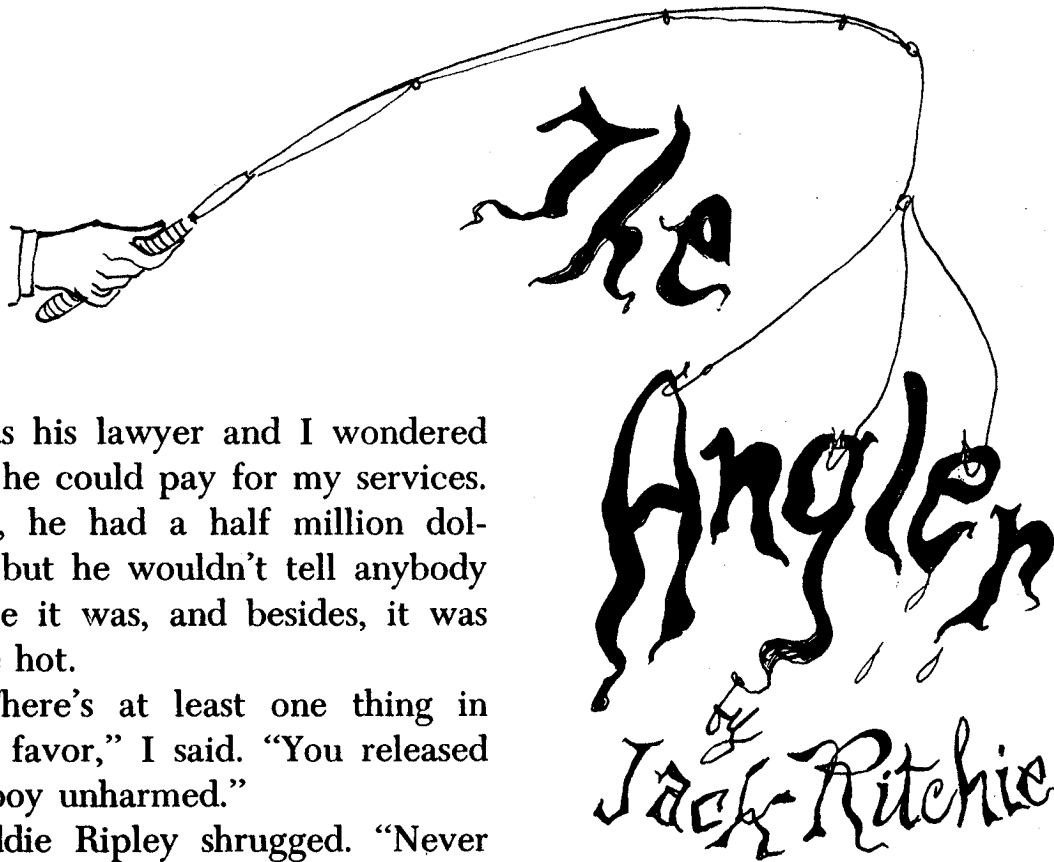
TIME TO KILL <i>by Dick Ellis</i>	105
---	-----

SHORT STORIES

HEAR NO EVIL <i>by Kevin O'Donnell, Jr.</i>	2
THE ANGLER <i>by Jack Ritchie</i>	18
EGO BOOST <i>by Richard O. Lewis</i>	30
NEW NEIGHBOR <i>by Talmage Powell</i>	36
THE WINTER DEAD <i>by Stephen Wasylyk</i>	50
BLUE GYPSY <i>by Al Nussbaum</i>	65
YELLOWBELLY <i>by William Brittain</i>	72
TROUBLEMAKER <i>by E. R. Carlson</i>	85
O TANNENBAUM <i>by Frank Sisk</i>	92

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Fishing appears to be a livelihood for more souls than official statistics reveal.



I was his lawyer and I wondered how he could pay for my services. True, he had a half million dollars, but he wouldn't tell anybody where it was, and besides, it was quite hot.

"There's at least one thing in your favor," I said. "You released the boy unharmed."

Eddie Ripley shrugged. "Never touched a hair of his head. I was going to let him go after a while even if his father didn't come across with the ransom. Why would I want to hurt a kid? I like kids."

Two weeks ago, Eddie had kidnapped twelve-year-old Frankie Sorrenson and demanded and gotten \$500,000. When the police caught him, they had found no money on him or in his vicinity

and he refused to tell them where he had hidden it.

"I think the kid enjoyed the whole thing," Eddie said. "I got him all the comic books he wanted, he had my portable TV, and no school. He probably gained a couple of pounds while he was with me because I fed him real good. Ice cream, pop, hamburgers. The whole bit."

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"What about the father?" I asked. "Do you suppose he enjoyed the entire incident too?"

Eddie snorted. "The kid told me plenty. His old man hardly knew he was alive. Frankie's been with nursemaids and stuff like that since his mother died, when he was two."

Frankie's father, Gus Sorrenson, controlled the state's largest construction company and also, it was generally agreed, a considerable number of county supervisors. Consequently our state is laced with his highways, a great number of which seem to be superfluous.

When his son was kidnapped, he had immediately announced that he would not be intimidated. He would refuse to pay the ransom. If he yielded to the kidnapper's demand, it would only encourage other kidnappers across the country.

Ten percent of our population applauded his courageous stand. The other ninety percent wrote letters to newspapers intimating a certain heartlessness on his part. After ten days—and considerable negative publicity—he capitulated and paid the ransom.

Eddie Ripley brushed back his prematurely gray hair. "You know why I hired you? Because you got a reputation. I hear they tried to disbar you three times."

"Misunderstandings," I said. "No one could prove a thing." I changed the subject. "There is still the question of the ransom money. The police haven't found it and apparently you have no intention of telling them where to look."

"That's right."

I shook my head. "Eddie, you'll never get a chance to spend a cent of it. No matter what I do for you, you're a cinch to get at least life imprisonment."

He grinned. "I'll be eligible for parole in twelve years and eight months."

"Forget the parole. Do you think any parole board is going to turn you loose if that \$500,000 is still missing?"

Eddie shrugged. "I guess not. So I'll play it cool for three, four years. Put in good time until I get out of maximum security. I broke out of the pen twice before, you know."

Ripley was certainly an optimist. Yet it was quite true that he had, in his career, escaped from state confinement two times. "The police have the serial numbers of all those bills. And probably the money is marked in other ways too. If you try spending it, even ten or fifteen years from now, you'll be nailed in a week."

He agreed. "But I know where to get rid of it."

"At an eighty or ninety percent discount?"

"No. Dollar for dollar. Or nearly so."

"A Swiss bank? Things aren't quite what they were, Eddie. They wouldn't take a cent of it."

"Not a Swiss bank. I mean one of those islands in the Caribbean that are all turning into republics. What holds them together is the tourist business and the world banks that suddenly open branch offices there. Them banks don't give a damn where the money comes from, just so they get it. They know how to launder it and get it back into circulation on the other side of the world with only a small discount."

He leaned a bit closer. "I was going to take it there myself, but something went sour with the caper and right away the cops were looking for me. I didn't stand a chance of getting out of the country. So I buried the money. In five places."

"Five places? Why five places?"

"Because I don't trust nobody. I put \$100,000 in each hole." He smiled. "Do you know anybody who'd like to make \$100,000 easy?"

I coughed slightly and waited.

He lowered his voice, though it was not necessary. We were alone in the small room at police head-

quarters. "Suppose I tell somebody where one of those holes is? And suppose this somebody took the money he found there to one of them islands and deposited \$80,000 in a bank where I could get at it when I was ready and he could deposit \$20,000 in his own name. And suppose he came back with the proof that he done just that? Then I guess I'd tell him where to find the second hole, and so forth, until we run out of holes."

I listened to my thoughts for a moment. "Why not tell this person where *all* of the holes are? It would save a lot of traveling back and forth to the island."

He smiled again. "Because I wouldn't trust this person as far as I could throw a lead habeas corpus. He'd probably take off with the whole half million and leave me with nothing but tears."

I displayed an understanding nod. "Suppose this unmentioned person should take off with *all* of the hundred thousand he found in the first hole? He could save himself five trips to the island, and a hundred thousand one way appears to be as good as a hundred thousand another."

"Because if he did that, I'd blow the whistle on him. I'd tell the cops he's got some of the ransom money. I might even say that

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he was my accomplice. But if he does things my way, the hundred thou he ends up with is clean and spendable. Nobody knows where or how he got it."

I diddled with the clasp of my briefcase for a few moments. "The unnamed person in question will need a little time to think over the proposition. And to see if it can be done."

When I left Eddie, I stopped in at the district attorney's office and talked to Assistant D.A. Porter, who would handle the prosecution.

He did not overwhelm me with hospitality. "Is Ripley going to tell us where to find the money?"

I took an unoffered chair. "Not yet, at least. I suppose you've done some searching?"

"Every place we could think of. He probably buried it somewhere, and this is a big country."

"You went over his apartment?"

"Of course. We even looked up his ex-wife."

"Ex-wife?"

"Yeah. They've been divorced over five years, but you never can tell. For \$500,000 they might get together for one hit. But nothing turned up. She even volunteered for a lie detector test. Our graph man says she doesn't know anything about the kidnapping or the money. She says she never sees

Eddie more than a few minutes when he comes to pick up the kid on Sunday afternoons."

"The kid?"

"He has a boy about the same age as the Sorrenson kid. He gets to keep his son two weeks in the summer too. All part of the divorce arrangement. His ex-wife says Eddie wasn't much of a husband, but he's crazy about his kid."

Early the next morning, Gus Sorrenson appeared at my office. He's a heavy man with small eyes that glared at me. "So you're defending the kidnapper of my son?"

I corrected him. "I am defending the *alleged* kidnapper of your son."

He brushed that off. "I suppose you're wondering why I'm here?"

"Naturally."

"I might as well get right to the point. I understand that this Ripley character has refused to turn the ransom money over to the police."

"Quite true."

Sorrenson sputtered. "What the hell good will the money do him now? He's not going to be in circulation again for a long, long time, if ever. His only chance for a parole is to turn over the money right now."

"I pointed that out to him. But

he wants to hang on to it anyway. Maybe the thought of still having it will keep him warm in the dismal years ahead."

Sorrenson glowered. "I had a hell of a time raising that cash. A hell of a time. Had to turn in bonds. Sign notes. The cops swore up and down that I'd get it all back. Every cent of it."

"Obviously they were wrong."

He leaned forward. "Let's not beat around the bush. I know when to cut my losses. I'm ready to make a deal."

"A deal?"

"That's right. If Ripley turns over \$400,000 of that money, I'll let him keep the rest."

"I don't quite see what he has to gain by that."

"Look, I'll tell the police that I got *all* of the ransom back. That way the hundred thousand Ripley keeps will be clean. Nobody will be looking for the bills. Hell, he could have it invested for him and it could double or triple by the time he's eligible for parole. He'll be a rich man when he gets out."

Sorrenson managed a wink. "I don't care how the two of you decide to split the hundred grand. Fifty-fifty, or whatever you think is fair to your client."

I mulled it over. It was true that if I went along with Ripley, I would wind up with a big

\$100,000. But there was always the possibility that something might go wrong and I would inherit more trouble than I could possibly handle.

Doing things Sorrenson's way, I'd manage maybe only fifty grand, but it would put me on the side of the angels—which was considerably safer.

I smiled. "I'll see what I can do, Mr. Sorrenson, I'll see what I can do."

The next morning, I put the offer to Ripley—or at least my version of it. "So Sorrenson will let you keep fifty grand of the ransom money, if you return the rest. It will be a clean fifty grand, Eddie. Just lying there in a bank and making money for you to spend when you get out. And you'll undoubtedly get that parole when you become eligible."

Eddie wasn't buying. "Hell, no."

I cleared my throat. "I just might be able to get Sorrenson to up the offer to sixty grand." I watched his face hopefully. "Maybe even sixty-five. But that's the absolute limit, Eddie. I don't think he'll go for more."

Ripley glared. "Not for fifty grand, a hundred grand, or two hundred grand. I'm going to wind up with \$400,000 and not a cent less." He studied me as though he

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had decided to get himself another lawyer. "And somebody else is going to pocket a hundred thousand, but I haven't decided who yet."

"Good," I said quickly. "Good."

He frowned. "Good what?"

"I mean I am considerably happy that you turned down Sorrenson's offer. I was hoping you would. Really, Eddie. But I had to pass it on to you. That's ethics, Eddie—to let you decide for yourself what you want to do. You made a wise decision. A wise decision." I shifted a little in the hard wooden chair. "About depositing that first hundred grand, Eddie. Don't you think we ought to begin just about now?"

He remained dubious. "Not yet. I got to know you a little better."

That night in my apartment I made myself a long drink. I wasn't too enthusiastic about five island trips. Not that I didn't think Ripley's plan would work, but there was always that element of risk in handling hot money.

Then I brightened.

Suppose that after I told Sorrenson that Ripley had turned down his offer cold, I mentioned Ripley's counter-offer to me—the hundred thousand in each pot thing. And I would suggest that I *pretend* to go along with Ripley. For a cut of \$100,000, of course.

It was the only way Sorrenson could expect to get his money back.

Sorrenson and I could even get police cooperation. They could manufacture the bankbook or whatever Ripley required as proof that his money was being put into the island banks.

My apartment door buzzer sounded.

I opened the door and stared into the face of a burly man wearing a black domino mask. He held a blued automatic in his gloved hand.

I backed up, as directed by the gesture of the gun. He entered and closed the door behind him.

His hair was quite flaming red, and he had an inch-long scar on the left side of his cleft chin.

He spoke. "I read about you in the papers. You're Eddie Ripley's lawyer, right?"

Was it best to admit or deny it? Which did he want? "Well, at the present moment, I am. However, if there should be any objection from anyone . . ."

"You get to see him whenever you want to?"

"Yes. So far, at least."

He seemed satisfied. "Relax. I'm not after you. I hear he's still holding onto that half million."

I nodded.

The red-haired man sat down.

His gloved left hand fished a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He lit up from a book of matches. "I want that five hundred grand," he said. "All of it."

"I assume you expect to get it. Why?"

"Because I got Eddie Ripley's son."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

He exhaled smoke. "What Eddie can do, I can do. So Ripley kidnapped the Sorrenson kid and got \$500,000, and now I kidnap Eddie's kid and I expect to get five hundred grand too. From Ripley. I come here because you get in to see Eddie regular and can communicate."

I blinked. Kidnapping a kidnapper's son somehow just didn't seem cricket. Yet, apparently it had been done.

The red-haired man continued. "This whole thing is just between you and me and Eddie. I don't want nobody running to the police."

I was still in a bit of shock. "What about the boy's mother? Won't she bring in the police?"

"No," he said emphatically. "I impressed on her that I would send back the kid piece by piece if she did. Starting with the left ear."

I shuddered. This creature wanted the *entire* \$500,000? Ut-

terly unreasonable. Perhaps something could be salvaged for later distribution between me and Sorrenson.

"Eddie might love his son," I said. "But \$500,000 worth?" I chuckled. "You and I, sir, are reasonable men. Eddie's love undoubtedly has its limit, which I would estimate at \$100,000. Even then, I feel sure it would be like pulling teeth."

He smiled. "Speaking of teeth, I'll send those back too, one by one, after I run out of ears. I want the whole five hundred grand or it's D-day for the kid."

D-day? Dismemberment Day? Clearly the man was a monster. One cannot haggle with monsters, and yet . . .

I cleared my throat. "Of course you realize that this money is all marked. Attempting to spend it will be hazardous to your health. However—for a slight consideration—I could suggest a place where—"

He interrupted. "I know where to launder the money. And I'll be getting a suntan and drinking rum and cola when I do."

So he knew about those island banks? Damn.

I needed time to think, to plan something else that would not leave my pockets empty. "Assuming that Ripley will agree to pay

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the ransom, there will still be some difficulty in gathering all of the money together. Eddie has buried it in five different places. He hasn't told me where, of course, but I gather that the spots are far apart. I might have to do considerable traveling to assemble the entire amount. It might take weeks."

"You got one week," he said. "One week or I buy myself stamps and start mailing things."

"How will I get in touch with you?"

"I'll do the touching. By phone."

When he left, I bolted the door.

Carefully I retrieved the matchbook he'd left behind, handling it only by its edges.

It was a typical twenty-match pack, advertising a national chain of supermarkets on the cover, but twelve of the matches had been used. The red-haired man had worn gloves when he lit up here, but I doubted that he had worn gloves when he had used the pack in lighting any of those missing matches.

I slipped it into an envelope and drove to the suburban home of Sergeant Ben Luther.

Luther appeared at the door in slippers, carrying a can of beer. He smiled when he saw me. It meant business for him—unofficial

business for which he expected to be paid.

I handed him the envelope. "There's a pack of matches in there. I want it gone over for fingerprints and I want to find out who they belong to."

"How do you know he's been printed anywhere?"

"I don't. But try anyway."

He took the envelope. "I'm not in fingerprints, and it's not so easy to ask favors like that at headquarters. I might have to lay out a few bucks here and there, but I think fifty will cover it."

Sheer robbery, of course, but I handed him five tens. "I want a rush job. Call me as soon as you get anything."

I went to see Eddie Ripley early the next morning. He paled when I told him about the kidnapping of his son.

"My advice to you," I said, "is to offer him \$100,000. There's no point in shooting the whole works if we . . . if *you* don't have to."

Eddie did not agree at all. "This is nothing to dicker about. The kid could get killed. Give the man the whole damn five hundred grand. I'm beginning to think I never would get to spend it anyhow. They're making jails a lot tighter than they used to."

He wagged a warning finger at me. "If anything happens to that

kid, I'm holding you personally responsible. And if you try to take off and leave that kid in the lurch, I swear I'll get out and kill you, no matter where you run."

"My dear sir," I said indignantly. "The boy's welfare is my concern too. I could not rest another night if he were harmed in any manner."

Ripley proceeded to reveal to me where he had hidden the money. He had memorized the directions, of course, but they were quite complicated and it was necessary for me to put them down on paper. Each cache was located in a lightly populated rural area where there was little danger of anyone questioning why you were digging.

It required two days for me to find and dig up all of the money.

When I reached my apartment, I bolted the door and spread the currency on my dining room table. I counted it. Yes, it was all there. Exactly \$500,000 in \$100 bills.

I found my pulse pounding as I stared at the stacks of money—all of it ripe for the taking.

Was it worthwhile becoming a fugitive for \$500,000? Was it worthwhile giving up my present identity, my contacts, my practice?

I rubbed my neck. Actually I

do very little repeat business. My clients seem to feel that dealing with me once is quite enough.

Was it worthwhile giving up all the things I had here for \$500,000 uneroded by income taxes?

Frankly, yes.

I sighed heavily. Unfortunately my lack of conscience contained an Achilles heel—I entertain a certain respect for the lives of children. Money was one thing, but I could not live with the responsibility of a boy's death, especially if it were accomplished ear by ear, tooth by tooth, and whatever.

My phone rang.

It was Sergeant Luther. "There were two pretty good prints on the matchbook. Thumb and forefinger, and we had them in the local files. Your man is Gaylord Bysse Brett Schneider. Six foot, two hundred pounds. Scar on cleft chin. Red hair. His record shows armed robbery. Been put away twice. Right now he's out on parole."

"I know."

"He lives right here in the city—167 North Bark Street."

When I hung up, my mind churned once again. Perhaps I had another angle to work on.

Ripley would have to pay the ransom, of course. But as soon as the boy was released safely, I would go to the police and tell

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them where to find the kidnapper. They would arrest Brettschneider and recover the money.

I paused. What would that do for me?

There was no official reward for its return and I couldn't count on Sorrenson's generosity to offer one voluntarily after the fact of recovery, so to speak.

No, I would have to see Sorrenson first and get an ironclad agreement—in writing—to insure that I would get \$100,000 of the ransom, no matter how or by whom it was recovered—just as long as it was.

I phoned the Sorrenson Construction Company for an appointment, but Sorrenson's secretary informed me that he was out of town for the weekend and she didn't know where.

I cradled the phone and decided I might just as well see where that redheaded monster lived.

I packed the money into a suitcase and took it with me down to the car. After all, I didn't want some burglar stumbling into a bonanza while I was gone.

Brettschneider's address, 167 North Bark Street, proved to be a Victorian structure in an old residential neighborhood gone to seed. It had apparently been cut up into apartments.

I made a turn at the end of the block, with the intention of coming back for a closer look, but then I quickly pulled to the curb and parked.

Ahead of me a somewhat battered sedan drew up in front of the address. A large, flaming-haired man got out of the driver's side of the car.

It was unmistakably Gaylord Bysshe Brettschneider.

The passenger side of the car opened too, and a small red-haired boy of about ten hopped out. He wore a baseball glove and the two of them tossed a ball back and forth a few times before they disappeared into the house. I noticed that the boy limped rather badly on his right foot.

So Brettschneider had a son too? Obviously the two of them were close; a typical warm relationship between father and son.

A new and startling idea formed in my mind.

There had already been two kidnappings, why couldn't there be *three*?

After Ripley paid the ransom and his boy was released, why couldn't I strike out for myself and kidnap the Brettschneider kid? All I needed was a dozen comic books, a portable TV, a place to confine the redheaded kid, and I was in business.

Certainly Brettschneider would pay the \$500,000 if he loved his boy at all, and every cent of it would be mine. Best of all, Brettschneider could hardly go to the police to complain.

I drove home in high spirits.

I made myself a large drink and recounted the money.

Naturally I wouldn't harm a hair of the kid's head, but I'd have to tell Brettschneider that if the ransom weren't paid, I would disassemble the boy, item by item. The mere suggestion should jolt his imagination enough so that he would be more than eager to pay.

I took a deep drink.

Of course Brettschneider would be worried sick about the kid. So would the boy's mother, and he probably had one.

What about the boy himself? I would assure him that I meant him no harm, but would he believe me? Would he, instead, be utterly terrified?

How does one deal with a terrified boy? Was I justified in traumatizing his little psyche for the sake of a rotten \$500,000?

I brooded through three more drinks before I was forced to accept the fact that I just couldn't go through with it. Kidnapping wasn't my kind of action. I would probably bungle it somehow anyway.

I sighed heavily. I would have to go back to Sorrenson and see what kind of a deal I could squeeze out of him.

I made my fifth drink, another double.

After the Ripley kid was returned, I would inform the police of Brettschneider's whereabouts. They would descend upon him and cart him off to prison for at least twelve years and eight months—just when his kid needed him the most.

I blew my nose. The kid had a bad limp. Was that why Brettschneider turned to crime? Did the kid need some kind of a corrective operation? An expensive operation? By specialists who wouldn't lift a scalpel without money in sight?

Was Brettschneider covered by Blue Cross? Blue Shield? Any type of medical insurance? Probably not.

There was no question about it. This was a cruel world. No matter which way one turned, one hurt someone or lost money.

That red-haired kid reminded me of Tiny Tim—the one in *A Christmas Carol*, of course. He had a bad limp too.

I wiped away the birth of a tear. How did my glass get empty so soon? I poured another.

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avoid sending Brettschneider to prison and still make a little money?

I woke up the next morning still at the dining room table. I took two aspirin, survived a cold shower, and breakfasted on black coffee before I went to see Ripley.

Naturally the first thing he asked was, "Did you pick up the money?"

I nodded tiredly. "Yes."

"Did the kidnapper get in touch with you again?"

"Not yet. But he will. And I'm sure your boy is still all right."

Ripley stared out of the barred window. "I had big plans for that money, but that's all gone now." He shrugged. "Well, at least Mabel will be out there to take care of the boy. She's getting married again. I guess she still goes for redheads."

"Redheads?"

He indicated his own hair. "Used to be red before it turned."

A sudden mouth-opening thought struck me. "Do you know anybody about six feet tall, two hundred pounds? Cleft chin with a scar on it? And red hair?"

He nodded. "Sounds like you're talking about G.B. Brettschneider. He's the man she's marrying. I met him in the pen and we both

got paroled at the same time. I introduced him to Mabel and I guess things took."

I was shaken. "One more thing. This son of yours, what does he look like?"

"He's twelve, but a little short for his age. Could pass for ten. Red hair. The last time I saw him he was limping. Twisted his ankle sliding into second base. Brettschneider's like a second father to the boy. They get along fine."

I closed my eyes.

The whole damn second kidnapping had been a fake. Ripley's kid never was in danger or would be. It was just a scheme on the part of Brettschneider, and probably Mabel, to pry the ransom money loose from Ripley.

I had been emotionally swindled.

Something else occurred to me too. At this given moment, Ripley did not have the money, Sorrenson did not have the money, and Brettschneider did not have the money—but I did; in a suitcase in my car.

I smiled.

On the way home to pack some of my clothes, I stopped in at a travel agency and picked up several brochures on the Caribbean.